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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 WARSAW 000584

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SUBJECT: POLAND'S GROWING INFLUENCE IN THE EU

Classified By: Political Counselor Dan Sainz for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. After five years in the European Union, Poland is increasingly skilled at "navigating" the EU, but still far from guru status. While Poland is tactically more effective, a lack of strategic vision, internal coordination, and active engagement in European capitals has hindered Poland's ability to assert its own interests in Brussels. That said, as Poland's economy grows and as the GOP continues to learn the EU's ropes, Polish influence in Brussels will continue to grow. Poland has been a welcome voice on issues important to the U.S., including energy security and increased support for the EU's eastern neighbors. Stepping up coordination before Poland reaches its full punching weight would serve our interests in Brussels. END SUMMARY.

EU WELCOMES CHANGE IN POLISH TONE

¶2. (C) Since taking office in November 2007, PM Tusk has worked to revitalize Poland's relations with the European Union. Gone is the angry, confrontational rhetoric of Jaroslaw Kaczynski's Law and Justice (PiS) government. Instead, Tusk and FM Sikorski have adopted a conciliatory tone, eager to present Poland as a constructive partner that sees its future clearly and closely linked with the project of European integration. At home, the Tusk government has countered PiS's "Euroskeptic" rhetoric by pointing to Poland's post-accession prosperity and the influx of EU funds and agricultural subsidies. Poland has benefited from an investment boom tied to its unfettered access to EU markets, the long-term stability offered by EU membership, and fiscal and business climate reforms that were part of the accession process.

¶3. (C) The GOP also claims Poland now wields greater influence in EU decision-making, citing "victories" on the EU's climate and energy package and the launching of the Polish-Swedish Eastern Partnership initiative. Polish officials point to Russia's increased interest in bilateral dialogue as a sign of growing Polish influence in Brussels. Moreover, Tusk used the April 29-30 Warsaw congress of the European People's Party (EPP), attended by several prominent EPP-affiliated European leaders, to bolster claims of Poland's newfound influence. Tusk's domestic PR campaign has been so successful -- and EU largesse so visible -- that even PiS officials now speak about "reforming" the EU, rather than "defending" Poland from the Union's clutches. Older member states, especially Germany and France, have welcomed the change in tone and made no secret of their preference for working with Tusk, rather than President Lech Kaczynski (PiS).

¶4. (C) Beyond the climate and energy package and the Eastern Partnership, it is difficult to pinpoint specific areas where Poland has successfully exercised its growing influence. Poland has proven itself a cooperative partner within the EU and is certainly becoming more adept at navigating the EU's various structures. However, a lack of strategic vision, internal coordination, and active engagement in European

capitals has hindered Poland's ability to effectively assert its own interests in Brussels. This has as much to do with the steep EU learning curve as it does with the metrics Poland uses to assess its success and influence.

#### THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

15. (C) Arguably, the Tusk Government's greatest success has been winning EU backing for the Polish-Swedish Eastern Partnership initiative to draw eastern neighbors -- Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova, and Belarus -- closer to Western institutions. According to Marek Menkiszak of the Center for Eastern Studies, Poland learned from past lobbying failures by demonstrating a willingness to consult and compromise. Poland incorporated other member states' suggestions, proposed a modest budget for the initiative, and made a concerted effort to show the Partnership added value to, but did not compete with the Eastern Neighborhood Policy and other countries' pet projects, e.g., the Black Sea Synergy and the Northern Dimension. Poland also yielded to German and French pressure to exclude reference in the initiative to the six countries' eventual EU membership. Menkiszak noted that Poland relied heavily on Swedish FM Bildt's close personal relationships with leaders of other member states and in Brussels to gain support. He and other Poles have also acknowledged that the key factor in winning EU support was the Russian invasion of Georgia in August 2008.

#### LACK OF COORDINATION AND STRATEGIC VISION

16. (C) While the GOP has learned important lessons about how to work the system in Brussels, the persistent foreign policy

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dispute between President Kaczynski and the Tusk Government has seriously hampered Poland's ability to speak with one voice in Brussels. The fact that certain member states, most notably Germany and France, have made clear their preference for PM Tusk, fuels PiS accusations of GOP "submissiveness" to larger member states. Further complicating the matter are divisions within the government. The junior coalition partner Polish People's Party (PSL) controls the Economy and Agriculture ministries which should drive priorities in Brussels and implementation of EU initiatives back home. Instead, PSL leader and Deputy PM Pawlak is sidelined in Brussels discussions as a small group of Tusk advisors sets priorities, often in an ad-hoc manner.

17. (C) Polish think tanks have criticized the noticeable lack of coordination within the GOP, and between the GOP and the Sejm. The PM-chaired Committee for European Integration (UKIE) and its supporting bureaucracy theoretically exercise government-wide responsibility for coordinating all issues related to Polish integration within the EU. In practice, individual ministries' European affairs departments tend to manage EU issues within their own competencies, while UKIE handles negotiations in Brussels on highest-profile issues like the EU budget and the EU climate change package. Draft legislation that would fold UKIE into the MFA has languished in the Sejm for months, putting Sikorski's plans to consolidate and rationalize EU policy coordination on hold for the foreseeable future. Working-level MFA officials report that Sikorski remains concerned about the lack of strategic thinkers in his ministry and in the PM's Chancellery, all the more troubling if Poland is to assume the EU presidency in 2011. To compensate, he has assembled a team of independent experts from throughout Europe to help formulate a strategic agenda for the Polish presidency.

#### LIMITED EFFECTIVENESS IN EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

18. (C) The lack of coordination extends to the European Parliament, where MEPs complain about the GOP's failure to consult with them, and the MEPs themselves seek prestige over power in committee assignments. In a recent study, the Warsaw-based Institute of Public Affairs criticized prominent

European Parliament candidates who plan, if elected, to seek positions on the EP's foreign relations committee, instead of committees that have a say in EU decisions, e.g., internal market, budget, energy, and the environment. This is in part because candidates, and the Polish public at large, have not grasped the extent to which EP legislation and directives shape Poland's domestic legislation and regulations. Most Poles continue to view the EU through the lens of external and security policy and, as a result, tend to neglect the complexities of First Pillar issues -- aside from concerns about absorption of EU funds. This lack of public understanding was reflected in low voter turnout (just under 25 percent) for June 7 EP elections.

#### POLAND'S "EXTRACTIVE" RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EU

¶9. (C) Successive Polish governments and the public at large tend to measure Polish influence in Brussels in zero-sum terms. While the Tusk Government's tone differ from its predecessor's, the net goal is still to get more out of the EU than Poland puts in. On energy security and climate issues, the Tusk Government has not been afraid to use the veto threat to achieve its objectives. Most notably, Poland cobbled together a blocking coalition of smaller EU member states and Italy to extract concessions (including breaks for coal) in the French-proposed climate package. Soon after, they secured funding for a patchwork of energy security priorities out of the EU's anti-crisis money. Even in EU negotiations to formulate a common position on a post-2012 climate change framework agreement, the Poles have repeatedly pushed to delay important decisions, drawing the ire of old and new member states alike. Poland's deputy negotiator in Brussels, Piotr Serafin, has admitted he often finds his agenda driven by opportunities to extract benefit in exchange for backing someone else's priority, rather than having a proactive, comprehensive agenda.

WELCOME TO THE MAJORS, KID

¶10. (C) Italy's recent proposal to form an EU Group of Six (G-6), including Poland, is an indication that the larger member states would like to draw Poland closer into their fold. While joining such a grouping would give Poland a certain amount of prestige, the GOP would arguably wield more influence as the largest of the EU's smaller member states than it would as the smallest of the large member states.

COMMENT

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¶11. (C) As Poland's economy grows and as the GOP continues to learn the EU's ropes, Polish influence in Brussels will continue to grow. With preparations for its 2011 EU presidency in full swing, Poland will look to larger member states for input and guidance in areas beyond its immediate interests and neighborhood. In a similar vein, MFA officials tell us Poland is eager for closer consultations and coordination with the U.S. Poland has been a welcome voice, if not always an effective one, on issues important to the U.S. Over the past few months, Poland was out in front on issues we care about -- e.g., greater EU cohesion on energy security, a coherent approach to financial supervision during the financial crisis, and greater support for the EU's eastern neighbors. Greater bilateral coordination before Poland reaches its full punching weight would serve our interests in Brussels.

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